



NACOP NOTES

September 2008

Message from the Co-Chairs

By: Drusilla Fratesi, MSA
Elizabeth Jackson, NAL
Pat Berry, Ex Officio

The NACOP annual meeting was held in Albuquerque, New Mexico, on June 24-26, 2008. The Council welcomed new members, Deborah Penick (PWA), Sandy Groneberg (MWA), and Diane Koch (NAA). The first day included teambuilding activities directed by Phil Smith from the Southern Plains Area.

The Council reviewed last year's goals and established new goals for this year that will focus on making information available to office professionals through the website, printed material (such as NACOP Notes and brochures), and material from other areas and councils. In addition, the Council discussed the charter, the evaluation of annual report preparations, and committee discussions and assignment. The annual meeting also provided the opportunity to establish groundwork for the 2009 Conference.

Departing members, Veronica Laird (PWA), Patty Coyle (NAA), and Heather Lewandowski (MWA) were recognized for their dedication and hard work on the Council.

The Council left Albuquerque with a renewed purpose and excitement for furthering our mission in the advancement of the office professionals within ARS and the USDA.

Standard Performance Plans coming

A team was established in July 2008 to identify competencies for the Program Support Assistant standard position description, as well as performance plans and a recruitment strategy. The goal is to have a complete standard position description package as we have for the AO and Financial Technician positions and others. The team's target completion timeframe is December 2008.

Contributed by Pat Berry for the Program Support Assistant Team



National Advisory Council for Office Professionals



Northern Plains Area Council for Office Professionals (NPACOP)

Contributed by Diona Austill

The Northern Plains Area Secretarial Advisory Council (NPASAC) was formed in 1996 by volunteers who were solicited from the Area. Although volunteers were numerous, the committee was limited to five members plus the Technical Advisor. The first meeting was held in September 1996 in Fort Collins, Colorado. At this meeting the NPA was divided up with each Council member representing identified locations. This will enable each Council member to participate in the activities of the Council and be a "local" contact for their identified locations. They are also responsible for dissemination of NPASAC information to Area secretaries. Charter members were Kathleen Aragon, Laramie, Wyoming; Louise Dalton, Fort Collins, Colorado – Chair; Sandy Mathewson, Manhattan, Kansas; Sharon Peterson, Grand Forks, North Dakota – Recorder; Jan Preston, Lincoln, Nebraska; and Sue Thornburg, Fort Collins, Colorado - Technical Advisor.

In 2007, the name was changed to the Northern Great Plains Council of Office Professionals (NPACOP) to better align with the national organization and to update the way we are seen with the ever changing office support needs of the agency.

The mission of the Northern Plains Area Council of Office Professionals (NPACOP) is to provide a resource for the Area Director and management for matters relating to office professionals. The Council is to work with the Area Director and management in an advisory capacity on new initiatives, which impact employees in the organization, provide input and serve as liaison to the NPA representative to the ARS National Advisory Council for Office Professionals (NACOP) on matters that impact employees Agency-wide, and to enhance the office profession through training, mentoring and recognition.

Our vision is to ensure that NPA has highly skilled professionals working in partnership with management to meet the office support needs of the organization.

Some of the accomplishments of the council are:

- Assisted with setting up the AO/Secretarial break-out sessions for the NPA Leadership meetings.
- Created a website presence to host all the information and make it readily available to all office professionals for quick reference to materials needed to perform job tasks (www.ars.usda.gov/npa/npacop).
- Established a Resource Assistant List of secretaries with expertise to serve as mentors to new secretaries in specialized areas. This list is available on the website.
- Prepared a Welcome Packet for new secretaries that includes pertinent information such as directories, links to websites, orientation check list, and a calendar with important dates to remember.
- Created a New Secretary Orientation at the area office to ensure new office professionals have the contacts and information they need to do their job.
- Created a Quick Reference Guide handbook of all procedures used by office professionals. This handbook is updated every other year and is available on our website.
- Created a logo for the council by holding an area wide contest.
- Distributed two resource books, Action Grammar and Microsoft Word Version XP Step by Step Handbook, and a NPASAC mouse pad to all NPA secretaries.

The NPACOP will be meeting again October 28-30, 2008, at the area office in Fort Collins, Colorado. This year we are updating the Quick Reference Guide and planning for the NPA Leadership meeting to be held in April of 2009.





Managing Conflict, Stress, and Time

Contributed by Sandy Groneberg

If you are like me, you THINK you don't have time to take classes to improve your skills and abilities; and there definitely isn't money to take classes!

Recently I re-read an email regarding AgLearn, so logged on to AgLearn and discovered the class "Managing Conflict, Stress, and Time." I thought it sounded like something I needed, so decided to spend a portion of my afternoon taking the class. Sometimes we already know the strategies, but we need a gentle reminder to help us develop good habits. Following are a few reminders from this class that I felt were helpful.

1. Review your tasks to see where you spend your time. One method of accomplishing this is to keep a log of how you spend each day for at least a week, and then analyze how you could recoup just 10 minutes per day. This will translate into almost an hour by the end of the week.
 2. Check yourself for time robbers: disorganization, procrastination, attempting too much, and interruptions and distractions. Strategies to manage time include: organize, do it now, say "No" and stay focused.
 - To get organized: make lists, reduce clutter, put files in order and plan each day's schedule. Organize work to do top-priority activities first, and then fill in with lower priority work. Decide if work is "Must do", "Should do", or "Nice to do" and work in that order.
 - There are several reasons why we procrastinate.
 - The task is unpleasant or boring. Solutions – Can it be delegated? Tell a friend your plan to accomplish the task so that you increase your likelihood of doing it. Think about how you will feel after it is finished.
 - Fear of failure. Fear comes from lack of self-confidence – neutralize the fear with planning.
 - You don't know where to start. You could start with the easy part, or the part you know best, or break the project into several subtasks and work on each subtask. Another option is to break the project into a logical sequence and start with the first task of the sequence. Just do it.
 3. Stay focused: avoid interruptions and finish one task before moving to the next. Try not to touch the same piece of paper twice by finishing something before you put it down. Schedule times to deal with email, and turn off "notify" if possible. Delete all information you don't need. Move all urgent messages to an "Urgent mail" folder and handle these at a specified time in your schedule. Have a "Later" folder for messages that aren't high-priority tasks.
- Lack of motivation. Look for the reason why you are procrastinating or unmotivated so you can take positive steps in eliminating it. Deal with the source of the problem.
 - If you are a person who attempts too much, learn to say "No" and also to move on when a project is done rather than continually "fine-tuning" it.
 - To help you say "No", review your to-do list to realistically determine your time commitments.
 - Control your ambition. Sometimes we over commit our time because we want to say "yes" to everything that comes our way. Be realistic about what you can really do.
 - Control your perfectionism. Yes, we want quality work, but there comes a point in time when we have to say, "This project is done." Some of us spend additional time on projects perfecting them way beyond what is expected of us.
 - Focus on the "important" – not the urgent. Spend your energy on important items rather than reacting to crisis. Many times crisis situations work themselves out over time. Acknowledge the importance of your critical goals. What is the main purpose of your job?

These tips are all from the AgLearn class "Managing Conflict, Stress and Time." There are lots of other free classes on AgLearn covering a variety of topics. Check them out in your "spare time!"



How to make figures and presentations that are friendly to color blind people

by

Masataka Okabe, Jikei Medical School (Japan) and *Kei Ito*, University of Tokyo, Institute for Molecular and Cellular Biosciences (Japan) (both are strong protanopes)

Colorblindness is not a total loss of color vision. Colorblind people can recognize a wide range of colors. But certain ranges of colors are hard to distinguish.

The frequency of colorblindness is fairly high. One in twelve Caucasian (8%), one in 20 Asian (5%), and one in 25 African (4%) males are so-called "red-green" colorblind. It is commoner than AB blood group.

There are always colorblind people among the audience and readers. There should be more than TEN colorblinds in a room with 250 people. (50% male and 50% female) There is a good chance that the paper you submit may go to colorblind reviewers. Supposing that your paper will be reviewed by three white males (which is not unlikely considering the current population in science), the probability that at least one of them is colorblind is whopping 22%!
[$22\% = 1 - (1 - 0.92)^3$]

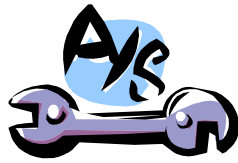
When preparing your presentations (papers, slides, web pages etc.), please take this into account. Here are some comments on how to make figures and presentations colorblind friendly.

Most important points

- In the fluorescent double-staining micrographs, DNA chips, etc, do not use the combination of red and green. Use magenta (purple) and green instead.
- For micrographs with triple or more channels, additionally show either greyscale picture of each channel, or the combination of most important two channels in magenta and green.
- For graphs and line drawings, label elements of the graph on the graph itself rather than making a separate color-coded key, since matching same colors in distant places is extremely difficult. Do not convey information in color only. Show difference BOTH in color and shape (solid and dotted lines, different symbols, various hatching, etc.).
- Red does not appear as bright and vivid color. Avoid using red characters on dark background.

For a full explanation of how to make graphs that color blind people can see, go to <http://jfly.iam.u-tokyo.ac.jp/color/>. This site has examples and very explicit explanations.

Contributed by Deb Penick



GRAMMAR Repair Shop

The Notorious Confusables

Select one answer from the choices provided after each sentence. The word you choose should fit the blank in the sentence.

1. I couldn't tell _____ she was serious or not.
 - a. whether
 - b. weather
2. _____ are too many possible answers to this question.
 - a. They're
 - b. There
 - c. Their
3. _____ going to help me with this?
 - a. Whose
 - b. Who's
4. Reading that book had a peculiar _____ on Evelyn.
 - a. effect
 - b. affect
5. I am completely _____ in this course.
 - a. uninterested
 - b. disinterested
6. I'm afraid she's going to _____ her grandmother's wedding band.
 - a. loose
 - b. lose
7. My mother has been _____ in bed all morning.
 - a. lieing
 - b. laying
 - c. lying
8. She has apparently found it difficult to _____ the circumstances.
 - a. accept
 - b. except
9. She apparently doesn't care about _____ origins in antiquity.
 - a. it's
 - b. its
10. It's usually hotter _____ this in July.
 - a. than
 - b. then
11. The politicians can't seem to find an appropriate _____ for the new community college.
 - a. cite
 - b. sight
 - c. site
12. I've never known the library to be _____ this quiet.
 - a. quite
 - b. quiet
 - c. quit

Adapted from: Guide to Grammar and Writing,
<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>

Answers: 1. a, 2. b, 3. b, 4. a, 5. a, 6. b, 7. c, 8. a, 9. b, 10. a, 11. c, 12. a.